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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001722

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR R, P AND EUR/CACEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA: NOT MUCH EXTREMISM HERE

REF: STATE 159129 04 YEREVAN 2151

Classified By: CDA A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4(b,d)

SUMMARY

11. (S) With 98 percent of the population ethnically Armenian and at least nominally Christian, extremism, and particularly Islamic extremism, is not perceived to be a serious problem in Armenia. The vast majority of Armenians belong to the Apostolic Church, an Eastern Christian denomination which has formal legal status as Armenia's national church. There is only one operating mosque located in Yerevan, where the majority of Armenia's 1,000 to 2,000 resident Muslims -- including Iranians, Syrians, and Kurds -- are tolerated, but not embraced. Armenian attitudes toward the Yezidis, a Kurdish cultural group of 40,000 people whose religion includes elements of Islam, Zoroastrianism and animism, are similarly ambivalent. Without evidence of extremist tendencies in the few Muslim institutions in Armenia, the GOAM and its security forces have taken little action beyond close monitoring (ref B). USG programs in Armenia target civil society, economic development, and political stability. End Summary.

LITTLE ROOM FOR MUSLIMS IN CHRISTIAN ARMENIA

12. (S) Islamic extremism is not perceived to be a great problem in Armenia, where approximately 98 percent of the population is ethnic Armenian and most Armenians identify Christianity as their ethnic trait. About 90 percent of Armenian citizens nominally belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, an Eastern Christian denomination which has formal legal status as Armenia's national church. Most of the nation's few Muslims left Armenia for Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, increasing the country's Christian religious and Armenian ethnic homogeneity.

SOCIETAL PREJUDICES KEEP MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN CHECK

13. (S/NF) Muslims in Armenia generally choose to maintain a low profile. As a result, public hate speech, overt fundraising, and open terrorist rhetoric either against the United States or ethnic and religious minorities is rare. Some Kurdish activists (ref B) assert they are affiliated with Kongra Gel, the successor organization to KADEK and PKK, though, they too, avoid provocative activities. Without evidence of extremist tendencies in Armenia's few Muslim institutions, the GOAM and its security forces have taken little action beyond close monitoring.

-- According to the GOAM's Department of National Minorities and Religion Head Hranoush Khataryan, the Yerevan-based Armenian-Kurdish Friendship Society conducts activities in the Kurdish-Yezidi populated regions of Armenia to support Kurdish national self-identification, religious traditions, and cultural heritage. In Spring 2004, the organization became the Kurdish-Yezidi National Cultural Center "Kurdistan," headed by Haidar Ali, a self-proclaimed "Kongra Gel Representative in the South Caucasus." Ali, who is no longer in Armenia, granted infrequent press interviews, but did not espouse terrorist rhetoric, and did not appear to have engaged in overt fundraising for any specific causes.

-- The NGO "Kurdistan Committee" has ties to Kongra Gel. The committee advocates on behalf of the Kurdish-Armenian community to resolve social, military, and criminal issues. The committee has offices in Yerevan, Armavir, and Alagaz.

-- Yezidi community leader Aziz Tamoyan, the self-proclaimed Chairman of the National Union of Yezidis and President of the World Union of Yezidis (some Yezidis in Tamoyan's own village say they've never heard of either Union), threatened to protest in front of U.S. Embassy Yerevan. He told us that his fellow villagers, who are frustrated by hollow responses from local government authorities to requests for municipal improvements, would only abandon the demonstration if "embassy staff meet with the villagers" to discuss their

numerous complaints against the Armenian Government. Tamoyan claimed municipal development projects discriminated against Yezidis in favor of his Armenian neighbors. The protest did not materialize. On September 29, Embassy Yerevan will dedicate a new community center, funded through a USG Community Self-Help Grant, in Tamoyan's predominantly Yezidi village of Zovuni.

USG ASSISTANCE IN ARMENIA INDIRECTLY COMBATS EXTREMISM

14. (SBU) The USG has contributed over USD 1.6 billion in assistance to Armenia since its independence in 1992 (about USD 85 million in FY2005). USG assistance programs focus on helping Armenia achieve three goals, which indirectly address extremism: 1) an open and pluralistic civil society; 2) a functioning market economy; and, 3) a stable and secure political environment in the region.

-- To determine USG funding priorities, avoid duplication of efforts, and coordinate USG assistance to meet Armenia's development goals, the Ambassador chairs the Assistance Coordination Group (ACG), a bi-weekly meeting of key officers from each of the USG's funding agencies -- Embassy Yerevan DCM, Pol/Econ Chief, Public Affairs Officer, and Consul, USAID Mission Director, the DOD Office of Defense Cooperation, the Director of the USDA-sponsored Center for Agricultural and Rural Development (CARD), Embassy Yerevan International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Assistance Program Regional Coordinator, Peace Corps Country Director, and the Resident Advisor for US Treasury Office of Technical Assistance. Embassy Yerevan has also designated one political officer as Embassy Assistance Coordinator.

-- The US Government has spent more than USD 30 million on educational and professional exchange programs in Armenia. Embassy Yerevan's Public Affairs Section, in cooperation with local and international partners, develops and implements academic, professional, and cultural exchange programs, English language programs, speakers programs, and the International Visitor Program. In 2005, the U.S. Government has sent 186 Armenian citizens to the United States on academic and professional exchange programs. Since 1993, the USG has funded study programs in the U.S. for more than 4,500 Armenian citizens. None of the participants were Muslim.

-- The Public Affairs Section (PAS) also maintains Embassy Yerevan's Information Resource Center (IRC), a long-term project that provides Armenian citizens access to reference materials and services on U.S. foreign policy issues, U.S. societal values, economic development issues, and Armenian media reviews. Annually, about 2,000 Armenian citizens visit the IRC. PAS also opened two American Corners in 2005, one in Yerevan, and one in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city. Located in public libraries, the American Corners provide direct access to materials on the U.S. and to the Internet for local citizens. They also provide venues for the Post Outreach Program, which among other things includes monthly appearances by Emboffs speaking to audiences of interested English-speaking Armenians. The Yerevan American Corner has seen upwards of 400 visitors a month.

COMMENT: INDIRECT ASSISTANCE LIKELY TO CONTINUE

15. (C) For the foreseeable future, Muslim outreach and tolerance programs for the small, quiet Muslim community in Christian Armenia will likely remain an indirect activity resulting from USG efforts to enhance civil society, democracy, and economic development.
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